

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs A Marshall
The Acting Headteacher
Conway Primary School
Conway Road
Sparkbrook
Birmingham
B11 1NS

Dear Mrs Marshall

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CONWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Deana Holdaway HMI and Lois Furness, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 May 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF CONWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 14 and 15 May 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, the chair and vice chair of governors, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, the senior leadership team, groups of pupils and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

At the end of the autumn term 2007 the headteacher resigned. Subsequently, two senior teachers were appointed as acting headteachers to lead and manage the school during the spring term 2008. An executive headteacher was recruited from 1 February 2008 to support the school's senior leadership for two days each week. At the end of the spring term both acting headteachers left the school. One was seconded to another school within the local authority and the other is absent because of sickness. The local authority is currently funding replacement posts at the school. Three other teachers also left the school at the end of the spring term.

For the first two weeks of the summer term a retired headteacher was brought in to lead the school, on a temporary basis, and was supported by the executive headteacher. The current acting headteacher, who is one of the LA's associate advisers, started work at the school on Monday 21 April and is expected to be at the school until the end of the summer term. The executive headteacher resigned with effect from 21 April. The retired headteacher has also finished working at the school. The LA has seconded an experienced teacher from another school in the authority to join the school as an acting deputy headteacher from 19 May. The governors have been successful in recruiting a full time permanent headteacher, who is expected to join the school on 1 September 2008. In the spring term, the executive headteacher restructured the school's leadership posts, on an interim basis, until the end of July 2008. A new senior leadership team, year group and subject leaders were established and teachers started work in their new roles at the beginning of the summer term 2008. The governors, with the support of the LA, are holding interviews on 23 May to recruit a deputy headteacher. The LA has informed governors of its proposal to replace the governing body with an Interim Executive Board (IEB) and its intention to seek the Secretary of State's permission to appoint an IEB. Governors have been given until 23 May to respond to this proposal.

Achievement and standards

There has been no significant rise in standards, which remain low. In some year groups, standards are very low, for example in writing in Years 3 and 4 and in numeracy in Years 4 and 5. Less than half the pupils are currently working at the level expected for their age. The predicted outcomes for the Key Stage 2 tests indicate that standards in mathematics are expected to rise, from a very low base, whilst attainment in English and science is expected to be lower than in 2007. Whilst

some pupils benefit positively from being taught in sets, based on their prior attainment, achievement remains inadequate and rates of progress are far too slow. There are very few lessons where pupils make good or better progress, which they need to do in order to close the wide gap between what they are currently attaining and the standards they should be reaching for their age. Work in pupils' books also shows low standards and slow progress, particularly in writing and mathematics. The quality of presentation in many books is poor. There are significant proportions of pupils in each year group who are capable of reaching higher standards and making faster progress than is currently the case.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2007:

- raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress throughout the school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils behave well and have positive attitudes. They are eager to learn and respond extremely well when their work is interesting and challenging. Many are enthusiastic, good humoured and welcoming to visitors. Pupils are polite and courteous and keen to talk about their work, even when it is too difficult or too easy.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is not improving at a sufficiently speedy rate. In too many lessons pupils' progress is either inadequate or just satisfactory and expectations are too low. This is mainly because teachers' assessments are not used well enough to match the pupils' work to their different starting points and capabilities. Consequently, the more able pupils are not being challenged enough and some pupils struggle because they do not understand what they have been asked to do. Lesson planning often fails to identify the steps pupils need to take in order to improve their skills, which causes confusion and impedes progress. There are also occasions when teachers are over generous in their praise of work which is either mediocre or of poor quality. The excessive use of low level undemanding worksheets slows pupils' progress further. Although there has recently been some improvement in teachers' marking, overall it is weak and unsatisfactory. There are few examples of teachers' comments which give clear guidance to pupils about what they need to do to improve their work. In too many year groups pupils' written work is not checked sufficiently and common errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation frequently go unchecked.

In good lessons, the pace of learning is brisk, teachers' expectations are high, and questions are used well to elicit understanding and challenge pupils' thinking. National Curriculum levels are used effectively to help pupils know what they are aiming to achieve, teachers have good subject knowledge and pupils have opportunities to talk in pairs and small groups, to extend their learning. Lessons are engaging and interesting and pupils are motivated to do well.

Nevertheless, there are too few good lessons and too much teaching which is inadequate. Only 23% of lessons were judged good, with 41% satisfactory and 36%

inadequate. The school is falling well short of the LA's target for December 2008, which is to achieve 100% satisfactory or better teaching and 60% good. Despite this, there is clearly a strong desire and will on the part of the teachers to improve the quality of their work. Many expressed thanks for the feedback about their work, even when messages were difficult to receive.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2007:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the use of assessment, to ensure that all teaching is good or better – inadequate.

Leadership and management

Since the inspection in November 2007, the school has experienced a period of significant turbulence and instability in leadership. As a result, there has been very little sustainable and measurable improvement in the quality of education. Relationships between the governing body and LA have been strained and a series of changes in acting headteachers has led to a breakdown in communication between governors and the school's current leadership team. There are a number of complex and important matters affecting the day to day management of the school, which need to be resolved. The failure to do so is diverting the acting headteacher from the school's overriding priorities, which are to ensure pupils make better progress, raise standards, and eliminate recurring weaknesses in the quality of teaching.

The acting headteacher has introduced a potentially helpful programme of staff development and training, giving priority to improving the use of assessment to track pupils' progress and inform lesson planning. Recent self-evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning indicate the need for improvement, although there is a lack of urgency about how and when this might be achieved.

There is confusion about the collation and use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and identify groups who are underachieving. Teachers make some use of assessment data to inform pupil groupings but there is no coherent or systematic analysis of the data, much of which is reported to be inaccurate. The acting headteacher is currently overseeing the introduction of a new system for data analysis, but insufficient thought has been given to how this might be used alongside what teachers are already using. There is an urgent need to clarify this situation and ensure that relevant, accurate and reliable assessment information is used more effectively by the school's leadership to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives in relation to raising achievement. The school is a long way from establishing a culture of individual accountability and collective responsibility for the quality of education pupils are receiving.

Monitoring and evaluation remain inadequate. There is not a sufficiently coherent, robust or rigorous approach to observing lessons, checking teachers' planning, and monitoring pupils' progress. Written feedback to teachers does not identify precise targets for improvement or review dates for checking that improvements have been made. There is too little focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' rates of progress and a lack of clarity about the support and coaching teachers can expect to help improve the quality of their work.

The senior leadership team (SLT) and subject leaders have only recently started work in their new roles. They are enthusiastic and express a determination to eliminate weaknesses in provision and outcomes, but are very inexperienced as senior leaders. Whilst a generally sound start has been made, particularly in leading improvements in English, planned actions are not sufficiently supported by clear and measurable success criteria to enable effective evaluation of the impact of actions. The school's action plan shows that senior teachers expect to receive some training in monitoring the quality of teaching, but there is clearly much to do in order for them to make a sustained and measurable impact on raising achievement and standards.

Governors have attended a number of training events to help improve their role in tackling the school's weaknesses and gain a better understanding of their responsibilities. Governors' committees have been introduced and the chair of governors has been involved in the regular monitoring meetings held by the LA to report on the school's progress. These are helpful developments, although the effectiveness of the governing body's work has been impeded by the ongoing tensions between some governors and the school and its relationship with the LA.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2007:

- improve leadership and management and ensure procedures for monitoring and self-evaluation are robust and rigorous in securing rapid improvements in pupils' progress – inadequate.

External support

The local authority is carrying out the range of support and intervention outlined in its statement of action. The school's link inspector, other senior officers, and a number of subject consultants have met their commitments to the school. The LA has ensured that governors have received accurate and helpful advice relating to the school's leadership and individual governors' responsibilities. The LA secured the services of an executive headteacher, and subsequently the current acting headteacher, to lead and manage the school when the previous headteacher resigned.

However, the impact of the LA's work in tackling the key areas for improvement has been too limited. Similarly, the quality of intervention since the school went into special measures, taking into account the undoubted depth and range of the school's weaknesses, has not been sufficiently rigorous or timely. As a result, the school has drifted without sufficiently strong and focused leadership, and there has been very little discernable improvement. The LA has agreed to amend its statement of action and submit a revised version to HMI by Friday 20 June 2008. The revised action plan is expected to show how the LA will secure stable and effective governance, produce a clear remit for the roles of the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, and prepare high quality induction and mentoring for the new headteacher. The plan should also introduce further quantifiable and measurable targets for improvement, particularly in relation to the impact of actions in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no further priorities for improvement. The school should tackle the key areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2007 with a renewed sense of urgency and greater rigour.